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Setting the Fashion

The White House flap over the dresses for Luci's wedding party illustrates the problem in Washington of bridging the credibility gap. Preparations for the Texas-sized wedding have already been unbelievable, so Liz Carpenter, press secretary for the Johnson distaff, had planned to release the details one-by-one, in a form suitable for mortal minds to grasp. For instance, it is already known that Luci will have twelve bridesmaids, but the rumors are unfounded that she also will have six traffic cops to direct them.

The most jealously regarded details, naturally, have concerned the dresses for the bridal party; and it was at this point that *Women's Wear Daily* got in the fracas. Those who may have missed the story, buried as it was among the war news, may need a summary of the facts: The White House, it seems, has become so used to the docility of a Washington press corps, lapping up mimeographed hand-outs, that it could hardly imagine any other way of divulging state secrets. Press representatives got background briefings on the dresses, but the sketches still carried a top-secret classification, presumably "eyes only." Although the days when the Cassinis combined dress designing with diplomacy are long gone, the White House presumed that the secrets were safe.

The garment industry is not noted for its timidity, however. WWD, as the trade paper is affectionately

known, would have nothing of the restrictions meekly accepted by the politically-oriented dailies. WWD refused to soil its linen with "background only" briefings where the top news of the year was concerned. WWD had other ways; its agents were in place, no doubt in the "black plans" division of the CIA (stories are circulating that Admiral Raborn was purged when the impending leak was discovered). When WWD published the sketches, the operations room of the White House went on instant alert. WWD's press credentials were withdrawn for the wedding, and WWD's reporters were enjoined from hollering down the White House rain barrel or climbing its apple tree.

The designs show Lady Bird wearing what is described as a short "Yellow Rose of Texas" dress, while the bridesmaids will wear pink. Despite our admiration for WWD's integrity and go-getability, it is a shame that the details were released too soon. Knowing the President's penchant for changing his mind when news of his projects and appointments is uncereemoniously leaked in the press, observers report that the White House has been a bedlam over the weekend. "Lady Bird," said the Voice in those riverboat accents, "I want this line fuller. Make it gathered in the front. Lower the hemline an inch and a half. The bridesmaids can wear blue . . ." LBJ long ago has set the fashion.